

Remarks on the 200th Anniversary of the Capitol and the Reinstallation of the Statue of Freedom

October 23, 1993

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished leaders of the House and Senate, Mr. Justice Blackmun, my fellow Americans.

We come here today to celebrate the 200th birthday of this great building, the cornerstone of our Republic. We come here to watch our Capitol made whole 130 years after the beautiful Statue of Freedom was first raised above this Capitol.

This is a moment of unity in this great city of ours so often known for its conflicts. In this moment, we all agree, we know in our minds and feel in our hearts the words that Thomas Jefferson spoke in the first Inaugural Address ever given on these grounds. He said that people of little faith were doubtful about America's future, but he believed our Government was the world's best hope.

What was that hope? The hope that still endures that in this country every man and woman without regard to race or region or station in life would have the freedom to live up to the fullest of his or her God-given potential; the hope that every citizen would get from Government not a guarantee but the promise of an opportunity to do one's best, to have an equal chance, for the most humble and the most well born, to do what God meant for them to be able to do.

That hope was almost dashed in the great Civil War. When the Statue of Freedom was raised, many people questioned whether Abraham Lincoln should permit this work to go on. But he said, during the war when so many thought our country would come to an end, that if people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign we intend the Union to go on. In 1865, Abraham Lincoln gave the first Inaugural Address ever given under the Statue of Freedom.

And he said, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in." And in that, the greatest of all Presidential Inaugural Addresses, Abraham Lincoln gave us our charge for today, for the work of keeping the hope of America alive never finishes.

It is not enough for use to be mere stewards of our inheritance. We must always be the architects of its renewal. The Capitol is here after 200 years, this beautiful Statue of Freedom can be raised, renewed after 130 years, because our forebears never stopped thinking about tomorrow.

We require the freedom to preserve what is best and the freedom to change, the freedom to explore, the freedom to build, the freedom to grow. My fellow Americans, I tell you that perhaps the biggest of our problems today is that too many of our people no longer believe the future can be better than the past. And too many others, most of them young, have no connection to the future whatsoever because their present is so chaotic. But the future, the future has a claim on all of us.

We have, because of our birthright as Americans, a moral obligation to face the day's challenges and to make tomorrow better than today. All we really owe to this great country after 200 years is to make sure that 200 years from now this building will still be here and our grandchildren many generations in the future will be here to celebrate it anew.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:33 p.m. at the West Front of the Capitol.

Remarks at the B'nai B'rith 150th Anniversary Havdalah Service

October 23, 1993

Thank you very much. Mr. Schiner, Mr. Spitzer, distinguished platform guests, ladies and

gentlemen. Hillary and I are delighted to be with you tonight, honored to be a part of your

150th anniversary.

When I appeared before your international convention a year ago, I said I would be honored to help you celebrate this anniversary if you would help me get into a position so that you would want me to help celebrate it. So tonight I thank you on two counts.

I am deeply honored to have been a part of your Havdalah service. It is always a great honor for me as a person of faith to be able to share the spirituality of other Americans. Far from being separate from the rest of your life, the spirituality that is renewed by you on every Sabbath infuses everything that you do.

This ceremony has been observed in captivity and exile and in freedom, on every continent and in virtually every country, and yet essentially it remains the same. And it is especially appropriate that we observe it here this evening on the occasion of your 150th anniversary on the steps of this memorial dedicated to the father of religious freedom in America, Thomas Jefferson, on the occasion of the year in which we celebrate his 250th birthday and the 50th anniversary of this Jefferson Memorial.

Jefferson attained a great deal of glory in his life. He was known and revered around the world. And yet when he died, he asked that on his tombstone it be printed only that he was the author of the Declaration of Independence, the founder of the University of Virginia, and perhaps most of all, the author of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom. In other words, Jefferson understood that in the end, the deepest power of all in human affairs, the power of ideas and ideals. In words inscribed just up these steps on this memorial, he said, "Almighty God hath created the mind free . . . No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship or ministry or shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinion or belief, but all men shall be free to profess and by argument to maintain their opinions in matters of religion."

That simple premise on which our first amendment is based is, I believe, the major reason why here in America more people believe in God, more people go to church or synagogue, more people put religion at the center of their lives than in any other advanced society on Earth. Our Government is the protector of freedom of every faith because it is the exclusive property of none. Just as you keep the Sabbath separate to keep it holy, we all keep our faiths

free from Government coercion so that they can always be voluntary offerings of free and joyous spirits. And just as the Sabbath spirit illuminates every day of your lives, Americans of every faith try to take the values we learn from our religions and put them to work in our communities. No one has done that better than the Americans who do the work of B'nai B'rith.

From your founding a century and a half ago—you may clap for yourselves; I think that's fine—[*applause*]*—*from your founding a century and a half ago on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, you've been dedicated to community service, to individual responsibility, to the struggle against every form of bigotry and injustice by investing in education and health care and helping the less fortunate, by tearing down barriers to achievement and weaving a fabric of mutuality and social responsibility. You have helped people from every faith and background to live lives of genuine accomplishment.

Even when I was growing up in Arkansas, I knew of the efforts of this wonderful organization. Back in 1914, you opened the Levi Hospital in my hometown of Hot Springs. And after all these years it still serves hundreds and hundreds every year without regard to their ability to pay. Today, the B'nai B'rith has also opened a senior citizens housing complex in my hometown. And believe it or not, those acts that help individuals are the things that I try hardest to keep in mind as President when making laws and making policies so that the spirit which animates people in their daily lives, helping each other one on one, can drive the Presidency and the Government of this great land.

It was that spirit which led me to propose and Congress to enact a new program for national service to offer tens of thousands of our young people the chance to earn their way through college by serving their communities and rebuilding this country and giving something to one another and thinking about someone besides themselves in those important and formative years of their youth. And I want to thank a distinguished member of the American-Jewish community, Eli Segal, my good friend, for being the real father of national service, for shepherding it through its creation and its enactment and now leading it along its way.

I want to thank you, too, for being there for America when tragedy strikes at home or abroad: flood victims in the Midwest; hurricane victims in Florida; earthquake victims not simply

in northern California but in Mexico City, Iran, and Armenia, they are all in your debt. You helped to address the crisis in Somalia, launching your own drive to raise funds to stave off starvation when 1,000 people a day were dying there. In the cause of our common efforts, nearly a million lives have been saved.

The spirit you bring to your work explains the sense of kinship Americans of every faith have always felt for the state of Israel. It explains our yearning for peace in that land, sacred to three great religions. It explains the joy every American felt when the promise of peace for Israelis, for Palestinians, for all the peoples of the Middle East was made tangible on September the 13th in a single, stunning handshake.

I say to you tonight what you already know, that even in the joy of that moment, we must all remember that a lasting peace requires hard work, that enmity, stretching back to the founding of the state of Israel and before, cannot be made to vanish simply with the stroke of a pen. But let us not forget how far we have come. It would have been unimaginable just 2 months ago to think that between now and September 13th, the leaders of Israel have actually sat down with the leaders of Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Qatar. And there is more to come. Israelis and Palestinians are engaged in intense negotiations to implement their agreements. Israel and Arab business people are meeting to lay the foundations of economic cooperation. And I am very proud of the cooperation I have seen in the United States between American Jews and Arab-Americans, working on what they can do together to make the peace agreement work.

Clearly, more must be done, and we have not a moment to waste. Just yesterday, we were reminded anew with the tragic killing of a moderate Arab leader that there are those who have a greater stake in the continuing misery of the Palestinians than in the hope of peace for all the Middle East. We have not a moment to waste.

I am committed to building on the momentum we have created to achieve nothing less than a comprehensive settlement, one in which Israel secures real lasting peace with all her neighbors. To do that we have to be able to demonstrate that when Israel takes genuine risks for peace, the Arab world responds with a similar commitment to build a new era of peace and prosperity with Israel as a partner, not pariah.

The future for Israel and for the Jewish people is bright and full of promise tonight. For the first time we have the chance to achieve peace, and I am determined to see that it is real, secure, and enduring. We live in a time when ancient enmities are fading. We saw it not just in the handshake of Rabin and Arafat but in the remarkable partnership of Mandela and de Klerk, people who are giving hope that tomorrow can really be different from and better than today.

I ask all of you to think about what these times mean for us as Americans and for us as individuals. At prayer this morning many of you read the passages from the Torah where God asks Abraham not only to leave his father's house but to go forward to a new land and a new way of living and thinking.

Tonight, as we stand 7 years from a new century and a new millennium, our world is being transformed dramatically by political change, technological developments, dramatic global economic changes. We stand here tonight following the footsteps of wise men and women who faced the future with confidence, who offered a helping hand, who opened their hearts to God and asked to be led so that future generations might have better lives. That is what we, too, must do. As Thomas Jefferson did, as the founders of B'nai B'rith did, as Americans have done at every moment of change and challenge, I ask you on this occasion of your 150th anniversary to joy in the progress for peace in the Middle East, to take great pride in your own accomplishments and the givings but to resolve today that we will lay the foundation of progress and peace here at home: with health care that is always there; with an economy that serves the poor as well as those who aren't, that gives every man and woman a chance; with an end to hatred and bigotry, a commitment to make our diversity in this country a strength and not a weakness; with a commitment to engage one another in serious, moral conversations but to slow down the rhetoric of screaming and condemnation so that we can appreciate we are all the children of God.

In the end, I ask that we dedicate ourselves anew to the timeless promise of American life first proclaimed by Thomas Jefferson in whose large shadow we stand tonight, the promise of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." For all that B'nai B'rith has done to make that prom-

ise real and for all you will do in the tomorrows to come, on behalf of all the people of the United States, I say a profound thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:45 p.m. at the Jefferson Memorial. In his remarks, he referred to Kent Schiner, international president, and Jack J. Spitzer, former international president, B'nai B'rith.

Remarks at the National Italian-American Foundation Dinner October 23, 1993

Thank you very much, President Guarini; Foundation Chair Stella; Director Rotondaro; my friend Art Gajarsa; my good friend Congressman John LaFalce, who wanted Hillary to speak tonight, I'm going to tell this on her—and John, you know John was reported in the paper saying, “I know I shouldn't say this, but every time I see Hillary I just want to hug her.” [Laughter] So we came here tonight so he could do it in front of 3,000 people and it would seem perfectly legitimate.

Mr. Ambassador, I thank you for your eloquent remarks, and I hope you will tell the Prime Minister that I value his friendship and the friendship of your nation. I know there are about 300 of your country men and women here tonight. I thank them for their presence, and I look forward to going to Italy next year to the G-7 meeting. Hillary and I went there in 1987. It was one of the best trips we have ever made as private citizens, and I dare say, we won't have a chance to do quite as many things the next time as we did then.

You know, I was really looking forward to this tonight. I mean, last year when I came I was as nervous as a cat in a tree. It was close to the election; I had no idea if I were going to win. They put me up against Barbara Bush who had an 86 percent approval rating. [Laughter] I knew at least half the people here weren't going to vote for me anyway, and all I could do was think about how awful it would be if I messed up. So I thought tonight will be a gem; I'll show up as President. It'll be wonderful. First thing I have to do is take a picture of Dom DeLuise and Danny DeVito. I'm about six seats from Gina Lollobrigida and DeVito sits in my lap. [Laughter] This whole thing has been incredibly humbling. I'm kind of getting used to it, you know. I mean, look at this, Al Gore gets to go on David Letterman;

Hillary speaks to the Congress and a poll, taken in bad taste by USA Today, says that after she addresses the Congress for 3 days, virtually without notes, 40 percent of the American people are convinced that she is smarter than I am. I practically don't know how the other 60 percent missed it. [Laughter]

It was so bad the other day, I was being so humbled, I went to California seeking respite, and when I got there I thought, well, at least here they said I would go to L.A., and I would stay in the Beverly Hilton Hotel. And I knew it was kind of a jazzy place and Merv Griffin owned it, and I thought, well, I'll get there and Merv Griffin will come shake hands with me, and they'll take me up and put me in some gorgeous suite and I'll feel like the President again. This is a true story, now; I'm not making any of this up. I show up, and Merv Griffin is there and he shakes hands with me. He says he's got a gorgeous suite, and I'll feel like the President. But he says, “Before you get on the elevator, I want you to know that I've been following your activities very closely, and I've put you on a floor which does have one permanent resident. And I thought it was a place that would really fit for you.” And I'm getting really excited, you know? I'm in Hollywood, I mean my mind is going crazy. And I get on the elevator, I go up to the whatever floor it was, the elevator opens and there, standing there to welcome me, as God is my witness, is Rodney Dangerfield who gives me a dozen roses with a card that says, “And a little respect.” [Laughter]

Well anyway, there are a few good things happening tonight. I mean, Justice Scalia is to my left. And I'm about to have a victory that is the equivalent of Ronald Reagan's successful invasion of Grenada because Jack Valenti picked a fight with Janet Reno. [Laughter] I don't think